



# City of Charleston

JOHN J. TECKLENBURG  
MAYOR

## WEST ASHLEY REVITALIZATION COMMISSION

### NOTICE OF MEETING

The regular meeting of the West Ashley Revitalization Commission will be held beginning at 5:00 p.m., July 12, 2017 at 720 Magnolia Road (The Schoolhouse), Charleston, SC 29407. The agenda will be as follows:

### **AGENDA**

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|---|---|
| 1. Welcome & Call to Order  | Chairman, Councilmember Peter Shahid  |
| 2. Approval of Minutes from<br>May 10, 2017 & June 14, 2017                     | Chairman, Councilmember Peter Shahid  |
| 3. Regional Transportation Planning &<br>Citywide Transportation Study (15 min) | Kathryn Basha & Sharon Hollis, BCDCOG<br>Keith Benjamin, City of Chas. Traffic & Transportation<br>Rick Day, Stantec Consulting   |
| 4. Plan West Ashley Update &<br>Commission Discussion/Feedback (45 min)         | Victor Dover & Amy Groves, Dover, Kohl & Partners<br>Wade Walker, Alta<br><i>The planning team will provide a brief update regarding post-charrette work on infrastructure &amp; sustainability, community design &amp; land use, economic development, and housing; a more in-depth update will be provided on transportation. The planning team will engage Commissioners for feedback.</i> |
| 5. Other Business   | Chairman, Councilmember Peter Shahid &<br>Commission Members  |
| 6. Public Comment Period  | Chairman, Councilmember Peter Shahid  |
| 7. Adjournment  | Chairman, Councilmember Peter Shahid  |

The next West Ashley Revitalization Commission meeting will be held at 5:00 p.m. on Wednesday, August 9, 2017 at 720 Magnolia Road (The Schoolhouse), Charleston, SC 29407.

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, people who need alternative formats, ASL (American Sign Language) Interpretation or other accommodation please contact Janet Schumacher at (843) 577-1389 or email to [schumacherj@charleston-sc.gov](mailto:schumacherj@charleston-sc.gov) three business days prior to the meeting.

## **WEST ASHLEY REVITALIZATION COMMISSION**

May 10, 2017

A meeting of the West Ashley Revitalization Commission was held this date at 5:00 p.m., at Citadel Mall Center Court, 2070 Sam Rittenberg Boulevard.

Notice of this meeting was sent to all local news media.

### **PRESENT**

Councilmember Peter Shahid, Chair, Anne Frances Bleecker, Justin Ferira, Harry Gregorie, Diane Hamilton, Donna Jacobs, City Councilmember James Lewis, Michael Miller, Charleston County Councilmember Brantley Moody, John Osborne, Jimmy Palassis, Amy Riley, Charles Smith, Mayor John Tecklenberg, Councilmember Marvin Wagner and Jonathan Zucker. **STAFF:** Mandi Herring, West Ashley Project Coordinator, Jacob Lindsay, Director, Department of Planning, Preservation and Sustainability, and Christopher Morgan, Planning Director.

### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES – April 12, 2017**

Chair Shahid said Commission has a very active agenda. He said he would like to dispense with the approval of the minutes and go into the next order of business.

#### **Communications Subcommittee Report - Maria Aselage, Chair**

Ms. Aselage said they held their monthly meeting on May 4 at the Fabulon Center for Art and Education on Wappoo Road. They got an update from Ms. Jacobs on the April 24 and 25 community meetings. Both were very well attended and they were very pleased with the conversation after those events. They are now discussing ways to promote the planning sessions in the mall to the public. The City sent out some press releases and tried to get some publicity on local radio stations to invite persons to come out, especially to Saturday's sessions.

Ms. Aselage said at this point they are concentrating on their various areas. There are four areas that were divided among the West Ashley area. They are assigned those areas as well as various groups throughout the community that they feel they need to reach in order to try to communicate with them the upcoming events.

The next Communications Subcommittee meeting is scheduled for Thursday, June 8 at Fabulon. Ms. Aselage thanked Fabulon for giving them their space.

#### **Plan West Ashley Update – Victor Dover, Dover-Kohl Partners**

Mr. Dover said in addition to their planning team there are some interesting specialists at work on various topics such as an environmental scientists and civil engineers who specializes in environmental restoration and stormwater management doing the things like flood control issues, which were raised over and over in the last few weeks. He said they will hear from Horsley Whitten, Wade Walker, transportation planner and traffic engineer, and Dena Belzer from Strategic Economics.

Mr. Dover said a plan like Plan West Ashley is not meant to be a short term plan only. It is both short term and long range plan. They are looking at the entire West Ashley area and, where appropriate, they are zooming in on places to look at in detail where you need something special or is unique in some special way. The plan is like a rule book or policy book that's set out the City's intentions. One part of that will be recommendations about changes to the land development regulations like the zoning code and street standards. It is also full of policies that will need advice from this City Council that adopts it to the future elected officials about project priorities and intentions for West Ashley.

The second part of this is the communication device aspect where the plan has to funnel together all of these values and aspirations the residents have about what West Ashley should be over time as to restore what needs restoring and preserve what needs to be preserving, and change what needs changing. With the communication device they won't have just words and charts, they will have illustrations and what-if pictures to describe how the rules and policies would actually play out on the ground and the kind of place you can create.

The third part, the instructions set, are instructions for the local government and private partners in private development that set forth goals for specific actions (transportation, affordable housing, public safety, economic development) to be taking place over time. From the point of view of one of the department heads inside city government, the state DOT or other partners it is like instructions. From the point of view of the citizen stakeholders it is like a blank report card for five or ten years from now to be able to go back and look to see if they did those things 1, 2 3, 4, 5. Their goal is to get City Council to adopt the ones the residents want to tend to do.

Mr. Dover said this week in the mall at center court they are taking a process that might normally occur in somebody's cubicle or conference room at an agency and bringing it out in public and let everyone see how all the conversations unfolded and what priorities emerged in lots of these conversations are reflected in the draft of the plan. Over the last few days they have a series of interesting events that leads to Wednesday's event Open House. It takes place in Center Court where they will show some designs, displays, initial lists and sketches of work-in-progress. The illustrators and technicians from the big team are in the storefront and Center Court. Mr. Dover urged everyone to get close to the maps and drawings, and question their assumptions. They hoped everyone would talk to them about what they missed. This leads to Saturday's work-in-progress presentation.

Amy Groves of Dover-Kohl Partners presented what they heard at the community sessions. About 550 people attended over the four events. They handed out blue cards that asked what is one word that comes to mind about West Ashley today and in the future. They took in all the responses that came in and the word congested was the most often responded. The words home, diverse and potential were also among the highest. The words most responded for West Ashley in the future were connected, beautiful, vibrant, community, livable and home.

They asked the residents how do you move typically around West Ashley today. In Area 1 90% of the residents said they moved typically by car. The other areas were from 98% to 100% by car. Ms. Groves added it isn't surprising in West Ashley because there aren't a lot of choices. When they asked what transportation enhancements are most pressing in the future, it was split between car, bike, walking and bus. So it is like people want to see some of those other modes become easier to move around.

Ms. Groves said the next question they asked was of the many different potential options, what do you think is the most important for the future vision of West Ashley? They gave a long list of things such as community gathering spaces, economic development or more/different shops or workplaces. In Areas 3 and 4 the top responses for both communities were innovative stormwater design and having more connections (more ways to walk, bike, car and transit).

Ms. Groves said next they got out the base maps and asked the participants to draw on them of about an hour or an hour and a half. At the end of each session they had one person to stand up and report back on what they talked about at their table. They had 65 tables of assistant planners who came out for the meetings. They had multiple lists from the tables so they have been taking the lists and generated their own list of the things they heard most often and focused on them. She added what everyone will see is the results of their two weeks of work so some things might seem right or way off. So what they wanted to hear from the residents what they think about the initial ideas so they can work towards Saturday's work-in-progress.

Ms. Groves said they took all the comments they heard and put them into five categories, which they are going to talk about tonight:

1. Community Design
2. Transportation
3. Infrastructure & Sustainability
4. Economic Development
5. Housing

*Community Design*

Ms. Groves said they made their list of the things they have been hearing most often of what is important to people:

- Preserving community character and preserving the character of the neighborhoods
- Community brand and identity: cohesive signage, beautification at entry points, streetscapes
- New mixed use centers where could work of have a work area in West Ashley – There is a statistic that 81% of the workers who live in West Ashley work outside West Ashley. What they were hearing from people was they need more options to work in West Ashley and help with the congestion problem.
- Reuse retail spaces to improve character and design of some of the commercial corridors
- Shorten trips by mixing uses and more destinations west of I-526; could have more “little Avondale” areas

After the community input sessions, they gave the participants not only these maps but also zoomed in on different areas within West Ashley where some of these challenges of property like reuse of empty retail sites were something that could be addressed. They went over previous studies that were done such as the Dupont/Wappoo Plan and the Sam Rittenberg Corridor Plan. Using those as their initial information, they started to create a perspective. One example is the use of an empty retail site was the Piggly Wiggly site at Ashley Landing. They replaced the “suicide merge” behind the site and replaced it with a T intersection that created more space behind the building that could be reimaged for a new use. Joe Kohl, who was currently working on the sketches in the storefront, started to envision how could those divided walks could be subdivided into more walkable network of streets in the area. Once you have the walkable streets you setup potential for new development sites for buildings to come and front those streets.

#### *Transportation - Wade Walker*

Mr. Walker said transportation was one of the big issues. They have been working closely with Mr. Kohl and the other designers in looking at how to integrate transportation and figure out a transportation system that helps those kinds of visions become reality. When they were shown the framework of the streets they began working with Mr. Kohl in looking at some of the specific areas. Some of the things they heard that people wanted were:

- Pedestrian/bike improvements: better sidewalks, safer crosswalks, being to cross the “canyon” streets and being more connected
- Connect the West Ashley Bikeway and Greenway
- Bridges – how do you get people, not only vehicles but get pedestrians and bikes across the water when you have water on all sides; is it something that would retrofit to the existing bridge structure, build a new bridge, reconstruct the bridge and add a facility in or do you make a dedicated connection?
- Upgrade the transit – they have been working with CARTA this week and feel they got some good direction on those items
- More regional connections - 81% of people who work on the other side of the water whether it be to the north or over the peninsula they were looking at ways to make connections - the I-526 corridor and Glenn McConnell; connect the neighborhoods- they have seen a lot of people on the Greenway and Bikeway, how do you make it so it's even more accessible for people that live in the neighborhood and for those who live away from it
- Look at missing modes such as why don't we use the water for transportation? They are working with groups on that as well.

Mr. Ward said they tried to build their initial thesis of transportation around the comments because it says connected, community, vibrant and walkable. This is the direction they took. He showed some of the things they were working on from a connection standpoint. How do solve the crossing of main streets like Savannah Highway, Bees Ferry Road, and Sam Rittenberg? How do you complete the network of the

multiuse paths across there as well from the current connection of the Greenway and Bikeway and make even better connection to the neighborhoods? There are a whole range of options they have been looking at like designated corridors so the neighborhoods would be safer for walking and biking, or shared lanes for dedicated volume for pedestrians as well as the crossings, and things like lighting on the Greenway and Bikeway make it more available to all kinds of uses. Looking at transit they can talk about how technology is starting to work. Simple things can be done like understanding how long it's going to take for the bus to be there. Everyone has smartphones and an app can do real time tracking by stops. Update the quality of shelters by placing roofs on them so you're not standing in the sun or the rain. Another option is looking at the expansion of express service.

In reference to bridges, Mr. Ward said water has a range of options. Can bridges be retrofitted to facilitate a biking deck, maybe not on the deck but maybe below the deck? If you build a new bridge what would it look like? Would it be bike deck and transit? Also how do you use the water and places to use the water to connect to the peninsula and to North Charleston? He said they will be back with a lot of detail about this.

#### *Infrastructure & Sustainability – Jon Ford*

Mr. Ford noted they heard much about stormwater, drainage and flooding. They now infrastructure and water is critical to West Ashley. This is way they heard about infrastructure and sustainability:

- Stormwater drainage is critical as to how you get around West Ashley; impacts home and businesses
- Underground power lines
- Growing in a resilient manner, which means what decisions made in the plan impacts the decisions, investments and priorities that the City makes in West Ashley in the near future that in the next 20, 30, 40 years our kids and their kids are going to be living in a smarter way and the impact of those decisions on setting up sustainable West Ashley
- Green networks – street trees, more parks accessible to more people but it doesn't mean huge parks, it might mean green space within the vicinity of the neighborhood
- More park spaces and recreation opportunities
- Original green structure – they talked about original green structure filtering, infiltrating and stormwater management – the original green structure is trees that has so many benefits to our communities – retain what we have, preserve what we have and have more trees West Ashley

Mr. Ford said they heard a lot about water in terms of the constraints and the challenges of water in West Ashley. The reasons for that and the impact you see are that there are shocks of impacts of storm events (coastal storm events and rainstorm). There also the stresses on a weekly/monthly basis – high tides, drainage backing up in your neighborhood. Those impacts leach in from multiple areas. So physical restraints, growth and development over time, or that our green network- the wetlands, our natural sponges- are converted into hardscape (roads, buildings), the more runoff proceeds and that is exacerbating the flooding issues in West Ashley. There are some impacts from climate change that is sea level rise but also increasing frequency from the various storm masses being seen here in Charleston, West Ashley and South Carolina.

Mr. Ford said West Ashley is so integrally connected to the water culturally and historically. It is physically and economically connected to the water so how can we embrace that. We need a lot of green structures, pervious pavement, and systems that soak water into the ground with each site development.

Mr. Ford said having those systems add value to beautifying West Ashley, which is important, but you want to look at first in West Ashley perspective where does growth make sense. He indicated on a map the areas of high ground and locations of the drainage problems near the water where it is flat. The sea level rise maps showed existing wetlands and flood zones. In 2050, our children and their children will be looking at a different West Ashley in terms of where the water is and how this plan can adapt and understand the areas where the water is now and in the future combined that with existing growth (pavement, buildings, existing infrastructure down to areas that are green now), and looking at the those high risk environmental impact zones combining with existing value and transportation access. By

combining those two provides the framework for West Ashley to start understanding what areas makes sense to grow efficiently utilizing infrastructure, what areas might make sense to grow but might be in a high risk zone for flooding. As an example the mall can be rebuilt to where it embraces water in the future. Currently it is around the back edge of the mall. It might be worked in as an amenity if the building is built up. This is over a long period of time but to embrace water helps it in a sustainable way to adapt.

There is a whole category of areas that should be protected. Existing natural greens that are important in providing habitats that help wetlands endurance by flushing them out should be localized on a map as well as existing intact neighborhoods and cultural identity for those neighborhoods need to be protected.

Mr. Ford said they started hands on the plan at the top of the map with a fat marker to understand where growth made sense – high ground and existing infrastructure – and where they might to look at both protecting existing green space whether they are talking about for the very long term or maybe revert areas having varying flooding problems to nature.

The existing open space map is a combination of a lot of resources:

- Listing open spaces parks
- The Greenway connections need to be developed
- Inventorying existing parks to work on key additions in those key redevelopment areas,
- How to make certain green space that makes sense part of redevelopment

*Economic Development – Dena Belzer*

Ms. Belzer said this is what they heard:

- Focusing development and redevelopment activities
- Looking for diverse employment opportunities
- Paying attention to visitors
- Small hubs mixed with businesses

Ms. Belzer she took what she heard from the residents and distilled them into a set of goals they are trying to achieve. She noted this is the scheduled train wreck and if she didn't get it right they had the opportunity to correct her.

The first goal she heard is to bring more jobs to West Ashley making it an employment center and an employment destination. She noted they keep quoting repeatedly the statistic about how many people live in West Ashley but work someplace else. That reflects the fact that West Ashley was built as a residential community. That was really the initial goal. West Ashley is at an inflection point now, even outer West Ashley, which is different in character from inner West Ashley. But everybody in outer West Ashley is concerned about traffic congestion and how far they have to drive. In order to achieve one of the objectives they heard about in the early in the early about wanting to drive less, one of the key goals of that would be to bring more jobs here to match the whole range skills West Ashley residents have.

The second thing they want to do is provide diversity in jobs, retail and commercial spaces. Ms. Belzer spoke to many entrepreneurs in Charleston and people who live in West Ashley who are doing entrepreneurial activities elsewhere who are trying to attract entrepreneurs to West Ashley. This a local, home grown kind of activity so we don't want to just think in terms of who we are going to attract right now. We want to think about what new can grow up from the bottom line. We want to encourage reinvestment but we want to use clear rules. We want to provide the right infrastructure. She said when we talk about economic development we talk about impacting jobs. What every company won't tell you is not only are they looking for places for their workers to work, but they are looking for places for their workers to live. So you can never talk about economic development and jobs without also talking about housing or building options because we see in this pre-generational shift that we're seeing in the workforce, the younger people are willing to get to work in many more ways than the older generation did. Employers are now looking for mobility choice for how their workers get to work. They are also looking for places for workers to hang out. We need places where people go in and place their laptops on the table and spend all day working in the café.

Ms. Belzer said the final thing is prepare to reposition retail space. She noted brick and mortar retail is not going away. She commented Citadel Mall is not dead. They had been there a whole week and she was impressed by the amount of traffic going by, the stores that are open and the place feels alive. Regardless what people say in the press, there's people still shopping but on the other hand you may have to shrink that footprint. She said you need to prepare to think about other kinds of destinations, other kinds of activities and repurposing some of the space we have today.

### **Preliminary Economic Development Strategies**

In terms of strategies going forward, Ms. Belzer noted that this is very high level, in need feedback and she wasn't very sure about this but the first thing you want to do is reposition West Ashley as being open for business. We are no longer just about where people live, we want to be about where people work. The second thing you want to think about is how you can use that point of activities to create pathways so that everybody who lives in West Ashley can benefit from those opportunities. She commented the school district is already on this. They are preparing to build a new high school that will be about clear pathways and really being able to speak to a spectrum of students.

Ms. Belzer said they spoke to a lot of developers and property owners who said clear rules and they know how long it's going to take them through the process. It will be much easier to invest and that in of itself becomes an incentive for development.

We want focus resources on key nodes. Ms. Belzer said a few of these nodes will be mapped out by the team in the next few days. The public sector is going to invest here. They are all going through our main resources but there's money to be had. There are a lot of things that are already funded or can be funded relatively easily out of existing resources. That doesn't mean we can fund everything for everybody everywhere but it means that we can use the resources that we do have as the public to leverage private investment.

Ms. Belzer we need to look at renew before we replace. This is not necessarily a strategy about building all kinds of new stuff particularly in inner West Ashley but we want to look at how we can reuse commercial property, right size it and reposition. The greenest thing to do is reuse and recycle.

Ms. Belzer commented the final thing we want strategic about funding mechanisms. We are going to need to be thoughtful about how we are going to combine sources of funding to achieve all of our purposes. How can we use free infrastructure to also build mobility mechanisms. How could we use our transportation dollars to make housing more affordable.

### **Preliminary Housing Strategies**

In reference to housing, Ms. Belzer said this is another issue that came up again and again. People wanted to keep housing West Ashley affordable, look at vertical mixed use, look into more affordable housing, more housing for seniors and concerned about high density housing. She said what they heard from people is yes we need housing but we need to think about it in the context of community character. We can't just say housing production at any cost. We need to think about how to maintain affordability. She noted affordability can be defined in many ways so we want to talk about that before you want to ensure quality. There are other things that are strong in concept and weak in execution. So we want things that are going to be both strong in concept and sound in execution, and provide supportive infrastructure for housing across the board.

Ms. Belzer said in term of housing strategies, just providing a wider range housing types that can be built by right using the zoning ordinance will be important. Intensification, adding somewhat more dense housing is a pathway to affordable housing but this can be done in relatively modest scales and this is one of the things they will come back and study in more detail. You want to invest in transit because the cost of housing is driven up if you have to spend a lot money to drive back and forth, so they want to use the combined cost of housing and lowering transportation costs as way to make housing more affordable.

Ms. Belzer said Mr. Dover commented in the beginning West Ashley is a very big so some of the decisions about adding new things is going to require working at a smaller type of scale.

Education of the about housing affordability is a complicated topic and conversations need to be opened up about that because there will be investment decisions that people need to make, and then we will focus on funding and financial strategies.

In response to a comment by Mr. Moody, Ms. Belzer said some of these things are in conflict with each other and they have also heard this from the community. They will try to take all of these things into account and figure it out how to solve them. Some of these things might work in some places and not in others.

Chair Shahid wanted to emphasize what happened this past week. This was a series of workshops that began on April 24 and 25, and there were workshops this past Saturday. What everyone saw on the screen was a recap of the comments, input, feedback, ideas and suggestions people were feeding to the Dover Kohl team. It is not something set in stone but is a more of a response to the process and receiving input from the citizens who were participating in these workshops. This is the initial stage on this. On Saturday from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., they will reconvene at the Center Court. There will be another more formal recap and they will tie down some of the things heard this afternoon and they will tie some of those things we heard during these workshop sessions.

Ms. Jacobs thanked everyone for coming out this afternoon. She visited all of the workshops and was excited to see close to 600 people come out and spend that time with them. She said there was a lot of commonality and the big word was connected. She said it was good to see that at the start of the community meetings.

Ms. Hamilton said she was able to attend at least 2 charrettes and noted what caught her attention was those people who came not to complain but came with solutions. She was impressed by the amount of solutions that came from those who attended.

Chair Shahid said the two “C” words they saw as with the people commented how they visualized West Ashley now and what they want to see in the future. One was congestion and the other was connectivity. He commented on Monday it came across very clear as way to connecting the different sections, neighborhoods and communities of West Ashley with one another and that can be done through a variety of means not only by crosswalks, bike paths but also commercial type establishments like places to shop, eat, buy groceries, giving those small community hubs throughout different parts West Ashley, which would have a tremendous impact on other proponents of issues they are dealing with such as transportation and congestion.

### **Public Comment**

Stuart Lynn said West Ashley is not just the City of Charleston but is also the County. He questioned how the City of Charleston could do anything in West Ashley without the cooperation of the County.

Mr. Moody said that is why the County is involved in this. He noted he represents a good swath of West Ashley on County Council and it is a partnership. He added Judge Rawl, chair of Charleston County Council, has been considering these.

Jan Harmon of Heathwood said she liked what she heard about renewing rather than replacing and she hoped they would save that. She added she enjoyed Mr. Smith’s letter to the editor in the newspaper.

Ledlie Bell noted County Councilmember Moody spoke about partnership. She said there is one problem that fails to get addressed repeatedly and that is the basic doughnut holes because it is very hard in a comprehensive plan. Whether it’s drainage, whether it’s transportation, whatever it is, our state legislation doesn’t make it easy to change that and still have public service districts. She said we really have to want jurisdictions and need cooperation to put that in a political perspective on what changes will be made.

County Councilmember Moody told Mrs. Bell she was right. He said when you look at DuWap area and all the things that the County and City has been attending these meetings for the DuWap have created paths for the County and the City to come closer together in the DuWap. There are some conflicts but they are trying to iron them out.

Jeanette McCroy asked how much will the property taxes will go up.



Mr. Zucker said there are a lot of tools in the toolbox to be able to address this. One of the things is a TIF (Tax Increment Financing) that is already in place in West Ashley. They are encouraging developers through the various zoning regulations to help drive the process.

Ms. Belzer said they are not assuming that any of this will necessarily cause an increase in property taxes. If there were any kind of rate increases associated with any of the fees the residents are going to pay, they will be asked about it in advance. Nothing is going to happen without the residents' consent.

Mr. Ellison said if there are any possible increase wanted now that package would be self-sustaining and would not require any property tax. The technology that's in the market now does not require any property taxes or any investment.

Mayor Tecklenberg thanked Chair Shahid and the Commission, and the hundreds of citizens who participated so far in this process. He recognized Richard and Ginger Davis of Trademark Properties, who are partners in the ownership of Citadel Mall and thanked them for being the hosts this week.

Chair Shahid thanked the City staff, especially Ms. Herring, for all their work.

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 6:10 p.m.

Marcia L. Grant  
Council Secretary